



LEYB ROZENTAL (1916-1944)

Poet-Songwriter -Activist

(Layb / Leib / Leiba / Lejb / Lejbl / Rozental / Rozenthal / Rosenthal)

Leyb Rozental, born on 5 November, 1916 *(or 17 September, 1913)*, was the oldest child in a highly cultured Vilna Jewish family. His parents were Fruma (nee Khadash/Chodos – born in 1890) and Nochum Ber Rozental (born in 1888 – son of Lejb and Miriam).

Leyb, a short, popular student at the Jewish Folks Gymnazium, was greatly influenced by cultural discussions of the many poets, writers, and journalists who often visited his parents' home. Leyb had two sisters, Mary/Miriam/Mera and Chayela/[KhayeLe](#). His youngest sister, Chayela, was a talented singer and actress, and was to find success performing her brother Leyb's poetry and song compositions.

Leyb studied in an elementary school of the "Khevre mefitse haskole" (Society for the promotion of enlightenment [among the Jews of Russia]) and in Gurevitsh's high school / the prestigious Folks-Gymnasium. He played piano and loved writing stories and poetry. The young man was greatly influenced by conversations between writers and journalists as well as the discussions held in his parents' home. Often right after classes he used to go to his father's editorial office, and so became involved in the turmoil of editorial work. He gradually managed to master the skills of cultural management, which proved to be of use to him later in life.

When the famous Yiddish narrator and writer, Grosbart, visited Vilna, Leyb read some of his poems to him. Grosbart's praise and encouragement for the gifted fourteen-year-old poet led to the publication of Leyb's first book of poetry. [Zalbetsveyt](#) (Group of two), a book of poems written by Leyb and Yoysef Hernhut, was published in 1929. Leyb went on to have his poems, humorous sketches, and articles published in the *Ovnt-kuryer (Evening Courier)*, *Vilner Ekspres*

(*Vilna Express*), *Di Tsayt* (*The times*) and in many more Yiddish and political publications.

Leyb's father, Nochum Bar Rosenthal, was a quiet, short man who established a printing shop and published the popular Yiddish daily newspaper *Der Ovent Kuryer* / *The Evening Courier* in Vilna. He also got the license to produce a "Vilna" issue of the popular Warsaw Jewish Daily Newspaper. He received each printed Warsaw issue and he filled pages 2 and 5 with local Vilna news. Sometimes the news, delivered by train, was a day or two late....but very few cared. After school, **Leyb** worked at his father's daily newspaper, involving himself in and learning the publishing trade. Because the Vilna newspaper also contained ongoing chapters of serial romance novels, like "Sister Marther", Leyb began creatively writing new chapters to fill in the missing chapters if the receipt of chapters that arrived by airmail from America, were delayed.

The well-known **Ararat Theater** commissioned Leyb to write a few songs and short, light-hearted comedies, which received high praise. Leyb also wrote scripts and songs for marionette shows, political satires with a group called MAIDIM, where his sister Chayela sang as, and performed the voices of, the puppets.

From 1935, at the age of eighteen, he moved to Lida, the southeastern town in the Vilna region that had a population of forty thousand Jews. There, he published the **Lider Folksblat** (*Lida People's Newspaper*) and became an accredited correspondent to a variety of Yiddish publications throughout Jewish Poland, writing under the name of Charif.

By 1936, Leyb's writings took on a more serious tone as he embraced a socialist philosophy, praising the communist volunteers as heroic fighters against General Franco's fascist regime in Spain. He supported leftist movements for workers' struggle for human rights and his outspoken views led to several arrests (1939-40) by the nationalistic Polish police who did not approve of his articles and views, or his poems dedicated to the celebration of May Day. After a few days' incarceration, he would be released with a warning, and soon he'd be back on the streets again, fighting for his beliefs with "his mighty pen."

By now a mature writer, a poet with an enormous love of the Yiddish working class and the international proletariat, Leyb believed in the liberation of the masses from the yoke of capitalism. In his poems and articles he pinpointed the necessity of a united front of workers, a non-discriminatory party, whose aim was the betterment of life for all. Remembering his previous successful experiences in the theatre, he decided that the best way to propagate his ideas and thoughts to a wider circle of people would be by writing for the stage. He did this through songs, which would be sung by many people, heard over and over again. Through the situations on a stage, in a play about life as it was lived, easily understandable

to the viewers, he believed his ideas would remain in their memory. "This is the way to talk to the hearts, to play on their emotions" became his credo.

When the Russians came to Vilna in October 1939, they immediately confiscated all the communications outlets. They took over the printing shop and appointed Nachum's younger brother as the manager of the shop, and allowed grandfather Nachum to work as a typesetter. He was however, a gentle fellow, not one to complain.

When the 1939 defeat of Poland by the Red Army led to the establishment of a Lithuanian Soviet Republic with the renamed Vilnius as the capital, Leyb, with his co-writer, a young, talented composer named Kiejdanski, devoted themselves exclusively to Jewish folklore and patriotic songs, praising the army, airmen, and working champions of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The new songs captivated the hearts of the masses. Acclaim greeted his songs "Kumt unz bafrayen di Armey" (Army came to liberate us) and "S'flien aeroplanen" (Airplanes are flying). "Zitz ich mir baym fenster" (I sit at the window), "Machinist" (Mechanic) and many other of their songs were played regularly on Vilnius radio, including his hit romantic love ballad "*Wos darf ich hobn mer, az du bist mine*" ("What more do I need when you're mine?"), co-written with a composer named Henrykowski.

In January 1940, Leyb founded a touring theatre group entitled "Vilner Yiddisher Miniatur Teater-VIMT" (*Vilnius Yiddish Theatre of Miniatures*) and wrote and produced full programs of songs and acts. At the same time he was busy translating a variety of Russian songs and poems of value into Yiddish. The Yiddish Hour on the radio often featured the singing talents of Leyb's younger sister, Chayela Rosenthal, singing Leyb's and other songs.

Leyb's songs played on radio included

- **"Kumt unz bafrayen di Armey"** (Army came to liberate us)
- **"S'flien aeroplanen"** (Airplanes are flying).
- **"Zitz ich mir baym fenster"** (I sit at the window),
- **"Machinist"** (Mechanic)
- **"*Wos darf ich hobn mer, az du bist mine*"** ("What more do I need when you're mine?"), co-written with a composer named Henrykowski.

[Chayela](#), becoming a teenage Yiddish singing star in her own right, was the winner of the festival of the Lithuanian Folklore Songs competition, singing her brother's song. On 22nd June 1941, both Leyb and Chayela, were scheduled to appear at the Folklore and Song Championship in Moscow, but the German invasion on June 24 ended that journey.

GERMAN INVASION OF VILNA

In the earliest days of the German occupation, Nochum Rosenthal was one of the first to be taken away. In a roundup of about 5,000 Jews that began on September 1, he was removed from his home, marched out of Vilna, shot, and dumped in the pits of Ponar Forest. Two German soldiers and a Lithuanian policeman had come during the day and told Nochum to get a towel and some soap, announcing they were taking him to work somewhere else. That was the last time he was seen. Leyb, fearing the worst, disguised himself as a girl, jumped over their balcony and managed to escape by hiding at an uncle's house. He continued to avoid being caught in the many elimination roundups executed by the Nazis and Lithuanian special police, in which thousands of Jews were transported to unknown destinations, and many of Vilna's prestigious Jews were held as hostages to be exchanged for gold or jewels.

THE VILNA GHETTO

On 6th of September 1941, Leyb, his mother and two sisters, along with about 20,000 Jews left alive in the city, were evicted from their homes and forced to move into the cordoned-off confines of the Vilna Ghetto in the old Jewish quarter in the center of town. Without work permits they had to seek cover in basements and constantly change locations to survive. After some stability began to prevail in the ghetto, Leyb was helped by his literary friends to get a labor 'schuttschein' a work permit, to keep his family safe.

SAVING MANUSCRIPTS AND BOOKS

Leyb's reputation, popularity, and affiliation with the Vilna Literary Society stood him in good stead, and this, together with his ability to speak German fluently, secured him a job under Alfredo Rozenberg at YIVO – the internationally recognized Vilnius-based research organization Yiddisher Wissenschaftlicher Institut – the Jewish Scientific Institute. His job was to gather documents, books, works of art, and other important archives and to make a list, in German, of the inventory. The Nazi's nefarious plan was to transport all archives and artifacts of Jewish historical significance from that institution back to Germany, where the literature would either be destroyed or kept as a relics of a vanished, exterminated society.

In secret defiance, Leyb hid some of the more valuable books and archives, sometimes giving them to select, trustworthy Poles outside the ghetto walls for safekeeping. The group with which he worked, the "[Paper Brigade](#)," led by fellow writers [Abraham Sutzkever](#) and [Shmerke Kaczerginski](#) and other Jewish writers, poets, and journalists, some of them members of the Young Vilna Literary Club, also smuggled manuscripts and books within the ghetto, hiding them in canisters down in the sewers. It was a risky operation. Getting caught meant getting shot. Their goal was clear: to save their treasured literature in whatever manner they

could. Even while he was working, compiling the lists, risking his life to hide the books, Leyb never stopped writing his poems and lyrics. he also wrote many articles in the Ghetto Newspaper "Getojidijes".

MUSIC & THEATRE in the VILNA GHETTO:

When the Vilna Ghetto Theater was established, Leyb and his sister were given work permits and the perfect showcase for their creative talents. For Leyb, it was a period of important social and literary activity. Leyb wrote an article published in the ghetto newspaper called *Trep*, or Steps, describing the terrifying *aktions* in the ghetto. Working feverishly at night, often by candlelight, he wrote songs and revues for the theatre with the intention of inspiring people to maintain their determination to survive. "***Nisht gedayget, s'vet zine besser***"—"Don't despair, it will get better," was the motto that came forth. Leyb was what one might call a whistle blower today, in that he could hide within the lyrics phrases that would pinpoint acts of corruption and bad behavior by the functionaries, including bribes, ghetto police using military methods of dealing with people, all that was destructive and demoralizing for the community. He was the guardian of the mores and full human rights of the working class of the ghetto, preserving the dignity of those who were being denied it. He brought satire into his song "***Men darf zich kenen haltn***" – "You have to know how to behave". His catchy songs were sung by all the labor units outside the ghetto and by the people attending performances inside. "***Dos ghetto kind***" ("The Ghetto Child"), "***Suzi***," "***Vilna***," "***Ich vil tzaytn andere***," ("I Want Other Times), "***Yisroilik***," , "***Mir Lebn Eybek***" and many other songs, mostly sung by Chayela, entertained and uplifted their fellow prisoners. Leyb's connection with the prospective partisans was strong and he wrote songs and poems for groups escaping to the forests. The groups begged Leyb to leave the ghetto with them, but his loyalty and duty to his mother and sisters, as the man of the family, was strong, and he remained behind in the ghetto. The song "***Tzu, eins, zvei, dray***" -"*Forwards, one, two, three*" – became the anthem of the progressive Jewish youth. Leyb's songs also appealed to the normality of life by writing "***A liebe fun a geto moyd***" – "The love of a ghetto girl" – or "***Ich hob zich farchlobet***" – "I fell madly in love" – songs full of sentimentality, warm feelings of romanticism and humor. He was also busy dedicating songs for the "Yougend Klub", the Children's' Club of the transport brigade, organized by Joseph Muszkat, the leader of Poland's 'Masada'.

Many of Leyb Rosenthal's songs are still sung around the world today by those who know and love Yiddish. The song "***Yisroilik***", meaning "little Israel," refers to the endearing nickname given to many orphan boys in the ghetto, whose parents were taken away and killed. Left to fend for themselves, they survived as smugglers on the black market, often selling cigarettes or saccharin. In the first-person voice of the ghetto kid, *Yisroilik*, the lyrics describe his sorry situation as he calls out to people to buy his wares. Barefoot, and dressed in an old, oversized overcoat and pants made from a sack, he defies people who laugh at him. Proud

of his toughness, he admits to crying only when no one is looking. He didn't start out that way, he sings. Once he had parents who cared for and loved him, but now they're gone. Even though he's left on his own without a dime, he would rather whistle and sing his song than dwell on his sorrows. "Why talk about your sorrow, why think about your heartache—better don't talk!" That particular song of Leyb's became an anthem of Jewish survival, symbolizing the street-savvy, tough attitude of the small but brave child who helped smuggle messages and contraband goods in and out of the ghetto. Crawling through the sewers, slipping through fences, doing business under the table, these scrappy street urchins helped sustain lives with their dangerous assignments of obtaining, stashing and transporting supplies for the Jews stuck in the ghetto.

For his one-act play, *"Einer fun Unz"* ("One of Us"), about the tribulations of a Jewish child hidden by a friendly Polish family, Leyb received an award from the Society of Jewish Literates. His haunting songs *"Shotns"* ("Shadows") and the popular *"Ich Benk Aheym"* ("I Long for Home") emoted the sorrows felt by the ghetto inmates in their distraught situation. When my mother sang that last song from the ghetto theatre stage, people told her that even the young German soldiers standing guard in the back of the ghetto theatre were seen crying, as they related to the Yiddish words, so similar to German, about missing home.

Playing leading roles in her brother's musicals, Chayela soon become known as the star "wunderkind" of the ghetto theater. In Leyb's satiric musical parody *"Pesheh fun Resheh,"* Chayela played the part of a young girl, Pesheh, who reflects on the crazy situation of their ghetto life. Arriving in the Vilna Ghetto from the neighboring town of Resheh, Pesheh realizes that to stay alive she must not only have a strong character, but she will also have to pretend to be a family member of total strangers in order to get her work papers. Nothing seems normal, she sings in the title song "peshe Fun Reshe" / *"Ich Hob Shoyn Lang Nisht doh Geven"*, in a place where sisters have to pretend to be brothers, grandmothers act like children, and strangers fake being married. In so many of Leyb's songs from the Ghetto musical revues, including *"Moyshe halt zikh"* ('Moyshe hold on') his play on words, witty songs and comedic interchanges on stage made it possible for audiences to see the absurd humor in their own dreadful circumstances and enabled them to laugh at themselves in the midst of their own inescapable suffering. Under such conditions, that kind of artistic achievement was in itself a remarkable triumph of defiance. Some of his other song titles include *"A Kharakter"*, *"Resele"*, *"Di Bobbe"* and more...

Leyb actively cooperated with the underground fighters and partisans of the Ghetto and he used to compose poems and songs for them. On a few occasions, had the opportunity to escape to the forests with his resistance fighter friends, but he chose to stay behind, out of love for his sisters and mother. The partisans took his stirring songs of resistance with them into the woods, singing the march, *"Tzu,*

eynz, tzvey, drei!" ("Ahead, one, two, three"), his words instilling the promise of ultimate victory and vindication. Right up to the end of the ghetto in 1943, even when audiences sitting in the dark of the theatre auditorium were wondering if the next day would be their last, they sang along to the inspiring lyrics of Leyb's songs.

LIQUIDATION OF THE VILNA GHETTO

The ghetto was liquidated, on September 1, 1943. At 5:00 am Leyb and other ghetto inhabitants had already presented themselves at the gate and had been taken to Rossa Square. That would be the last day Leyb would see his mother and sisters. Men and women were separated and Leyb was among those herded onto cattle cars, 70 people per car, with no way of escape. The journey lasted several days, with no water, or food and one tiny barbed wired window, too high to see through, letting in some air. Destination: the forced labour Camp, [Klooga](#), in Estonia, situated not far from the capital Tallin. Leyb's songs accompanied many Vilna Jews on their final destination to extermination camps.

CAMP KLOOGA – ESTONIA

Despite being overworked, and suffering from exposure to the adverse weather conditions in that Klooga camp, Leyb and his musician friends continued to write songs and poems there. In collaboration with his friend, the well known Vilna composer and orchestra and choir conductor, [Wolf Durmashkin](#), Leyb wrote the song "*Lomir Shvaygn*" (Let us keep silent). Leyb also organized evening classes for his barrack, giving lectures on Yiddish classic writers. One of his last poems was "*Tzu Mine Yiddishe Mammeh*" ("To my Jewish Mother"), dedicated to his mother who had been killed after a selection.

Klooga Camp was enclosed by barbed wire. The men's and women's camps, separated by some 600 yards, had large two-story buildings for housing the prisoners who were forced to work in peat harvesting, camp cement works, sawmills, brickworks, and factory which manufactured clogs for camp prisoners. Conditions were extremely harsh. In the early years of the camp's operation, a group of some 75 prisoners began to organize resistance within Klooga; however, the frequent transfer of prisoners from camp to camp—both within Estonia and throughout Nazi-occupied territories—stymied the underground movement's ability to mount effective resistance.

On September 18, 1944, the commandants in charge of Klooga camp received orders to start evacuating Klooga. Facing defeat, the Nazis began all kinds of maneuvers to eradicate the remnants of Jews. The SS began the evacuation by putting most of the Klooga inmates, (that included Leyb's sister's future would-be father-in-law, Zacharius Jutan) onto an overcrowded transport train leading to Tallinn, where a boat was commissioned to bring all Jewish labor forces in that

area to the SS extermination camp, Stutthof, in East Prussia. 27 year old Leyb was strong, helpful always, kindhearted and supportive, helping the weak and sickly, the women in particular, to get on the trains, safely. After the trains were over fully loaded with people to be sent to the Baltic region, about 200 Jews were forced to stay behind at Klooga, to help clean the camp. Leyb was one of those who remained behind.

LEYB'S DEATH

The Nazis had a different plan for those leftover Jews. They marched Leyb and the other remaining men into the nearby Ponar forest where they were ordered to build a platform from wooden logs, hewn from surrounding trees. Leyb and some others were forced to lie on top of the logs. Then more logs were piled on top of the men, and then more men stacked on those logs until no Jew was left standing. The Nazis then shot them all and burned them. Leyb was amongst those burned in these pyres.... His brutal death, just two or three days before the Soviet Red Army arrived, on 25th September, 1944 to liberate the Camp.

A few days before the arrival of the Soviets, the Nazi's had set fire to the entire camp and only a few inmates, who had managed to hide in the rafters of the roof of one of the barracks, which did not burn, were left to testify to those events. A few days later, when the Soviet advancing troops reached the burned out camp, they, together with those few surviving Klooga prisoners who had managed to run and hide while the Nazis loaded the trucks and set the camp afire, came upon the sickening sight of the log pyres, the charred bodies, and the trail of carelessly strewn empty bottles of German beer that lay tossed to the ground.

- *According to another source, fellow poet, Shmerke Kaczerginski, wrote that Leyb was transported to Dautmergen Concentration camp and murdered there in January of 1945.*

"...Leyb left for posterity an important document about their thoughts and state of life, a picture of men, women and children, of workers, lovers and the elderly, all in songs and narrative, in comedy and drama – a ghetto kaleidoscope of events. I sincerely hope that his works will be studied by researchers, musicologists, historians, Yiddish language students and literati, whoever investigates this period of the dramatic annihilation of European Jewry, which was so rich in unusual experiences and so poor in the number of those who survived." – Naava Piatka and Xavier Piatka

MORE ABOUT LEYB'S SONGS:

Five of Leyb's songs are featured in the 2023 [National Yiddish Theatre Folksbiene](#) production of "AMID FALLING WALLS" .

In the book "Songs of the Ghettos and Camps," Shmerke Katsherginski published the following songs by Leyb Rozental: "**Negerlid**" (written in the ghetto, music by Misha Veksler, sung by Dora Rubina in the offering of Berger's "**Der mabl** (The Deluge)" in the ghetto), "**Shotns**," sung in the ghetto by Dora Rubina in the revue "Korone yorn un vey tsu di teg"), "Ikh vart oyf dir" (staged in the Vilna Ghetto by Dora Rubina), "**Ikh benk aheym**," "**Israelik**," which is R.'s first song, written in the Vilna Ghetto, music by M. Veksler, sung in February 1942 by Chayele Rozental, for the first time, in the second public evening of the Vilna Ghetto Theatre), "**Ikh bin shoy n lang do nit geven**," (written in the Vilna Ghetto, for the revue production "Peshe fun reshe," where there was portrayed the time when there was distributed the "yellow *sheynen*." For the *sheynen* the Jews of Vilna had to wear on the neck a circular plate with a printed number) "**Peshe fun reshe**," music by M. Veksler. In camp tarps (*torf-lager*) by the village Reshe, thirty kilometers from Vilna, several hundred Jewish workers from Vilna had worked, and in August 1943 the Jews were sent over from Reshe into the Vilna Ghetto. Under the name "peshe un reshe", the revue production was given in the Vilna Ghetto Theatre, "**Zusi[?]**" (the couplet, sung by Chayele Rozental, had traveled to the internal situations (?) in the ghetto, e.g., the gate receives the police horn to let products enter in, to promote, and the like — as Kaczerginski remarks — were sung at various times with other words, adapted to the situation), "**az a libe shpiln**" (that a play of love/charity) (portrayed as due to the privileges, which the Jewish police had in the ghetto, looking for some very friendly people. The song was sung by the author's sister, Chayele, and was from the first ghetto themes, which the actors in the ghetto theatre had performed.)

Leyb's songs also appealed to the normality of life by writing "**A liebe fun a geto moyd**" – "The love of a ghetto girl" – or "**Ich hob zich farchloybet**" – "I am overwhelmed with love for you" – songs full of sentimentality, warm feelings of romanticism and humor. He was also busy dedicating songs for the "Yougend Klub", the Children's Club of the transport brigade, organized by Joseph Muszkat, the leader of Poland's 'Masada'. His song "**Tsi eyns, tsvey, dray** (To One, Two, Three?)" (sung in the summer of 1943 in the Vilna ghetto by the actor Jacob Bergolski, became the anthem of the progressive Jewish youth. The song later was sung for the liberation of the concentration camps and generally in concerts by Emma Sheiver and through her recording of it), "**Pak zikh eyn**" (the song is — as Sender Weissman gave over to Sh. Kaczerginski — written in a *gerfarfuler* time for the Vilna ghetto, when the Gestapo had begun to send the remaining Jews from Vilna to the Estonia camps (Riga, Norve, Kivali et al). In that time, August 1943, the Red Army withdrew so far ahead, that the Vilna Jews were aroused by new hopes tht they would soon be liberated. When the actors in the theatre used to sing out "Dosmol vet zay nit gelingen, mirn zay (*d. h. di deitshn*), this little song, *pakht zikh eyn, pakht zikh eyn*, used to evoke a stormy ovation. The song was

performed by Chayele Rozental), and **"Mir lebn eybik!"** The notes to the songs: "Ikh benk aheym," "Israelik," "Peshe," "Az a lib shpiln," "Tsu eyns, tsvey, dray," "Pak zikh eyn," "Mir lebn eybik," were published in a book "Songs from the Ghetto and Camps." Herman Kruk in his "Chronicles from the Vilna Ghetto and the Camps" remarks, according to the ghetto news of 11 October 1942, "the theatre life the ghetto staged here, had a great role. ... may have been cited ... Leib Rozental, the author of three interesting numbers."

"In his dramatic works as well and his poems, Rozental refused to put up with the evil, which abounded in the Ghetto. The famous satirical reviews written by Leib attacked the evil. Leib remained the guardian of the trampled humanity." – Markas Petuchauskas, child survivor.

Chayela first sang 'Yisroilik' in 1942 at the second public theatre performance in the Ghetto. *Misha Veksler was the conductor of the Jewish Theatre Orchestra in the Vilna Ghetto and was killed during the liquidation of the Ghetto in September 1943.*

Chayela recorded **Yisrolik** in Paris, ca. 1948 along with other songs Leyb wrote like **"Sorinke"** and **"Ich Benk Aheim"** .

During his time in Camp Klooga he continued to write poems and songs, often in collaboration with other musicians, like his friend, the well known Vilna composer [Wolf Durmashkin](#), with whom he wrote the song **"Lomir Shvaygn"** (Let us keep silent).

["Let's stay silent, let's stay silent – not a word be said.. Let's close our eyes and say a prayer... No one can stop us from crying silently"](#) The song, its origin

and composers names were revealed in a book, "Vayse nekht un shvartse teg" ("White Nights and Black Days"), a memoir that Mark Dvorzetsky, a doctor from Vilna, who wrote about his time in Klooga.

Many of Leyb's songs are still being recorded and sung worldwide by Klezmer singers, pop groups and other solo singers and artists.

As stated in the [Museum of the Yiddish Theatre](#) :

In his book, "Songs of the Ghettos and Camps," Sh. Kaczerginski composed the following songs for R.: "Gegerlid" (written in the ghetto, music by Misha Veksler, sung by Dora Rubina in the offering of Berger's "The Deluge" in the ghetto), "Shadows," sung in the ghetto by Dora Reubina in the revue, "Karone yorn un vey tsu di teg"), "Ikh vart oyf dir" (performed in the Vilna Ghetto by Dora Rubina), "Ikh benk aheym," "Yisroelik." This is R.'s first song, written in the Vilna Ghetto, music by M. Veksler, sung in February 1942 by Chayele Rozental, for the first time, on the second public evening of the Vilna Ghetto Theatre), "I have not been here for long," (written in the Vilna Ghetto for the revue production of "Peshe fun reshe," where it was portrayed the time when the yellow shades [?] were distributed in the ghetto. To the beauty of the Jews of the Vilna Ghetto had to carry on its neck and keychain with an impressed number), "Peshe from Reshe," music by M. Veksler. In a *tarf*-camp by the village Reshe, thirty kilometers from Vilna, several hundred Jews from Vilna. In August 1943 they had the Jews from Reshe sent over

to the Vilna Ghetto. Under the name, “Peshe and Reshe,” came a revue production in the Vilna Ghetto Theatre, “Zi??” (the couplet, sung by KhayeLe Rozental, announced in the inner camp in the ghetto, for example, at the gateway the police *skhkhd far lazn areyntragn produktn, pratezshirn andere a.d.g.* –as Kaczerginski tells it– was sung at various times with other words, adapted for the camp, “that a love played” (portrayed due to the privileges, which the Jewish police had in the ghetto, looking for the friendship of certain people. The song was sung by a friend’s sister, KhayeLe, and was from the first ghetto themes, which the actors in the ghetto theatre had performed), “Tsu eyns, tsvey, dray” (sung in the summer of 1943 in the Vilna Ghetto through the actor Yakov Bergolski. The song later was sung for the liberation of the concentration camps and generally in concerts through Emma Sheiver (sp), and through her recordings), “Fak zikh eyn” (the song is–as Sender Vaysman had told Sh. Kaczerginski–written during a brutal time for the Vilna Ghetto, when the Gestapo had begun to send the remaining Jews of Vilna into the Estonia camps (Riga, Narva, Kivali, et al.) In that time, August 1943, the Red Army withdrew so far ahead, that the Vilna Jews were aroused by new hopes that they would soon be liberated. When the actors in the theatre used to sing out “Dosmol vet zay nit gelingen, mirn zay (*d.h.di German*), this little song, *pakht zikh eyn, pakht zikh eyn*, used to evoke a stormy ovation. The song was performed by KhayeLe Rozental), and “Mir lebn eybik!” The notes to the songs: “Ikh benk aheym,” “Yisroelik,” “Peshe,” “Az a lib shpiln,” “Tsu eyns, tsvey, dray,” “Pak zikh eyn,” “Mir lebn eybik,” were published in a book, “Songs from the Ghetto and Camps.” Herman Kruk in his “Chronicles from the Vilna Ghetto and the Camps” remarks that, according to the ghetto news of 11 October 1942, “the theatre life the ghetto that was staged here had a great role. ... it may have been cited ... Leyb Rozental, the author of three interesting numbers.” From among all who had composed songs in the ghetto, also the name of L. Rozental– H. Leivick quoted his “Tsu eyns, tsvey, dray” and remarked: “Also the whole of the fateful are used in the text with hollowed tears of a thin and idle day of awful sensation,” and trembling another song by R., remarks H. Leivick: “Jews laughed at and laughed at their own bitter happiness by a sleigh of art-created humorous and satirical songs. Understand that about sorry humor, no speech could be known, but someone to note what Jews really did have to create humorous humor, made their hearts harder, and their price was paid in order to find a little comfort, the difficult suffering.”

Sh. E. from ChayeLe Rosenthal and David Rogoff. Sh. Kaczerginski — “The Destruction of Vilna,” New York, 1947, p. 212. Sh. Kaczerginski — “Songs of the Ghetto,” New York, 1948, p. 35, 200, 343-44, 346-47, 357, 383-4, 389, 399, 404, 424, 426, 431. Herman Kruk — “Daily Book of the Vilna Ghetto,” New York, 1961, pp. 83, 369.

[View Leyb’s writings and songs below in photos from a book with Leyb’s poems and song lyrics](#)

LINKS:

Read more about Leyb in the book “[NO GOODBYES](#)” written by his niece, Naava Piatka

Visit : [Youtube channel – Chayela sings Leyb’s songs](#)

About **LEYB** and more by [Markus Petuchauskas](#):

[/https://www.lzb.lt/en/2015/10/15/taboo-against-death/](https://www.lzb.lt/en/2015/10/15/taboo-against-death/)

PRICE OF CONCORD by Markus Petuchauskas <https://gvf.lt/en/e-shop/markas-petuchauskas-price-of-concord-memoirs-portraits-of-artists-interactions-of-cultures-in-english/>

MUSIC IN THE HOLOCAUST by Shirli Gilbert: https://www.amazon.com/Music-Holocaust-Confronting-Historical-Monographs-ebook/dp/B001E0W7SI/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=shirli+gilbert&qid=1702643142&sr=8-1

HOLOCAUST MUSIC : <https://holocaustmusic.ort.org/places/ghettos/vilna/leyb-rozentel/>

More about LEYB <https://www.ushmm.org/search/results/?q=LEYB+ROZENTAL>

KLOOGA CAMP, Estonia <https://dirkdeklein.net/2016/09/28/forgotten-history-the-klooga-concentration-camp/>

MUSIC OF THE

HOLOCAUST: [https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Holocaust/Music and the Holocaust](https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Holocaust/Music%20and%20the%20Holocaust)

<https://yivoencyclopedia.org/printarticle.aspx?id=2199>

LOMIR SHVAYGN performed by Bavarian Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir – incl “Won’t Be Silent” : https://youtu.be/gvJ_xDjxdb4

[https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leyb Rozental](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leyb_Rozental)

Discovering the song **LOMIR SHVAYGN**

– <https://forward.com/culture/460662/written-during-the-holocaust-a-song-finds-a-second-life-as-a-social/>

Links to Leyb’s Songs and Poems:

<https://holocaustmusic.ort.org/places/ghettos/vilna/leyb-rozentel/>

<https://www.ushmm.org/exhibition/music/detail><https://www.ushmm.org/exhibition/music/detail.php?content=yisrolikphp?content=yisrolik>

<https://www.ushmm.org/collections/the-museums-collections/collections-highlights/music-of-the-holocaust-highlights-from-the-collection/music-of-the-holocaust/yisrolik>

“ZALBETSVEYT” – book of Leyb’s

poems: https://digipres.cjh.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE10259449

<http://digital.library.upenn.edu/webbin/freedman/lookupartist?hr=&what=7952> – List of some of Leyb’s songs and their historic recordings

The FORWARD: <https://forward.com/culture/460662/written-during-the-holocaust-a-song-finds-a-second-life-as-a-social/>

Review : THEATERPIZAZZ ...“As the war progresses and promise is in the air, uplifting songs of resistance, ...like “Mir Lebn Eybik!” (“We Live Forever”), make their rousing appearance. “<https://www.theaterpizzazz.com/amid-falling-walls/>

PERFORMANCES & RECORDING OF LEYB’S SONGS BY OTHERS

CHAYELA sings Leyb’s Songs: <https://www.youtube.com/@chayelarosenthal3875>

LOMIR SHVAYGN performed by Bavarian Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir – incl “Won’t Be Silent” : https://youtu.be/gvJ_xDjxdb4

MIR LEBN EYBIK – [LOUISA LYNE & DI YIDDISHE KAPELYE](#)

SHOTNS (shadows)- sung here by Betty Segal

<https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/he/exhibitions/music/shadows.asp>

ICH BENK AHEYM by ZOLA https://youtu.be/z4JFaeXSsas?si=UJACS5_9-WXdss_a

[Partisans Of Vilna: The Songs Of World War II Jewish Resistance](#) / **YISROLIK** sung by

Adrienne Cooper and Zalmen Mlotek on Album "[Ghetto Tango](#)" / ZOLA sings **MIR**

LEBN EYBIK: <https://youtu.be/WeISmkLOT4o?si=RCRPhyJUUhYgAR> / "VOICES OF

THE GHETTO": https://youtu.be/jIXwSlRNCKc?si=9TfNN_EPa7-G_pVC / **YISROLIK** by

Harriet Bennish <https://youtu.be/b2y6eMn0P1A?si=cRv1z8AlfzTXRtTP> /

Talila <https://youtu.be/63z3QuQ2bjc?si=xWiWwcI8NuTTtnOj> / Ich Benk

Aheym <https://youtu.be/ZGTEWULPWul?si=Y821eyRme4V645cj> /

PHOTOS

LEYB – as told by others

A gifted songwriter and literary figure: what would he have become had he survived the Holocaust?

By Benny Feldman

The doyenne of Yiddish theatre, Chayela Rosenthal, grew up in a world of Yiddish words and music.

Her older brother, Leyb (known as Leyb Rosenthal, the difference the surname being because of the use of an assumed English spelling of a Yiddish name), was a gifted writer, who would probably have become a huge star in the field of literature and theatre, had his life not ended at just 26.

Success came early, with the publication of a book of poetry at the age of just 14. And, while still a schoolboy, Leyb helped out at his father's Vinnitsa-based daily Yiddish newspaper, Der Ozerer Karper (The Evening Courier), becoming involved in many activities relating to the publishing trade, including editing new chapters for American serial romance novels that the newspaper published.

While still in his teens, Leyb was commissioned by a local theatre to write songs and comedy sketches. Despite his youth, they were successful among an adult audience. He also wrote material for the performance of puppet theatre.

When just 18, Leyb began publishing a newspaper in the town of Lida, called the Lider Folksblat (Lider People's Newspaper). At this time he became a socialist, highlighting the rights of the proletariat and showing an affinity with the Jewish working class. At times, his political views got him into trouble with the authorities but he continued with his work. This led him to focus increasingly on writing for the stage. Believing in the power of music as a means of communication, he wrote songs that many people would sing, thus repeating his messages about society and life.

For Leyb and his socialist friends, the arrival of the Soviets in Lithuania in 1939 was a moment of victory, and he began composing songs in praise of the Soviet Union. These proved popular and Leyb became a well-known name when his songs were played on the Vinnitsa radio.

These happy days soon ended.

NOTE: Cape Town resident, Zola Paskis Shuman, did not know much about her Uncle Leyb at all. It was only during the Covid lockdown, when she began going through boxes of material that had belonged to other, now deceased, family members that she discovered the story and the brilliance of the uncle she never knew. Thanks to undertaking this huge task, Zola has increased the life of a gifted man, and her work brings renewed appreciation of the music of her Uncle Leyb.



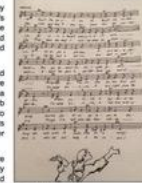
Siblings Chayela, Leyb and Mary circa 1930-40

However, just 14 months after the Germans, Leyb and Chayela's father was murdered soon after the arrival of the Germans, and Leyb had to take some daring steps to avoid capture.

Leyb, Chayela, their sister Mary and their mother were forced to leave their home and move to the Vinnitsa Jewish ghetto. In due course, Leyb became involved in the mission to save valuable Jewish manuscripts – an initiative known as 'The Paper Brigade'.

The opening of a ghetto theatre provided Leyb with the opportunity to produce far more material, and he wrote songs that have become enshrined in the legacy of Yiddish literature from this period. The most well-known of these is 'Mr. Lebn Eylek' (Mr. Live Forever), and it typified the messaging that Leyb aimed to convey: to provide hope to those trying to survive the awful conditions in the ghetto.

In September 1943, with the liquidation of the ghetto, Leyb was sent to a forced labour camp in Estonia. There, he continued writing new songs, all geared to memorialise the Jews of Vinnitsa and the horrors they faced under Nazi occupation. By this time, the vast majority of Lithuania's Jews had been killed, and a year later, knowing that they were facing death, the Germans undertook the murder of the remaining Jews, including Leyb, who died just a few days before the arrival of Russian troops, who liberated Lithuania from the Nazis.

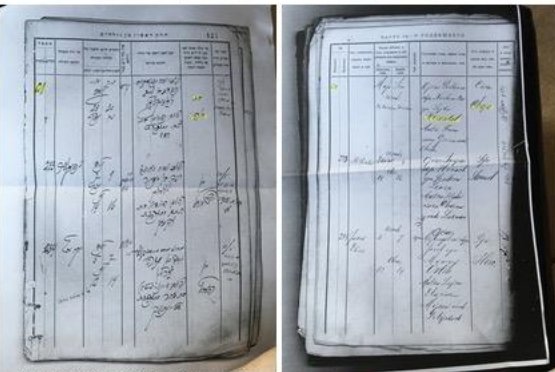
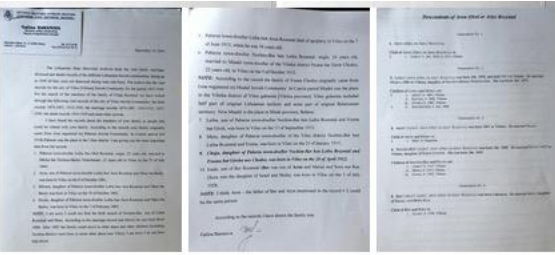


Leyb Rosenthal's contribution to the Yiddish language and to the recording of the horrific actions perpetrated against the Jews of Lithuania was huge. As recorded on the website, put together recently by his niece, Zola Paskis Shuman, "...

Leyb left for posterity an important document about their thoughts and state of life, a picture of men, women and children, of women, lovers and the elderly, all in songs and narrative, in comedy and drama – a ghetto kaleidoscope of events."

Had Leyb survived the War, he would probably have found international fame as a writer and musician. His story highlights an important element of genocide: that the actions of perpetrators of hate remove so much talent and skill from the world.

<https://chayela.com/leib-rosenthal/>



Photographs of Concentration Camps 1900-1914

Concentration Camp	Name	Date	Location
...	...	...	...

Vinnitsa Household Registers

Household	Name	Date	Location
...	...	...	...

Vinnitsa Household Registers

Household	Name	Date	Location
...	...	...	...

Vinnitsa Household Registers

Household	Name	Date	Location
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Vinnitsa Household Registers

Household	Name	Date	Location
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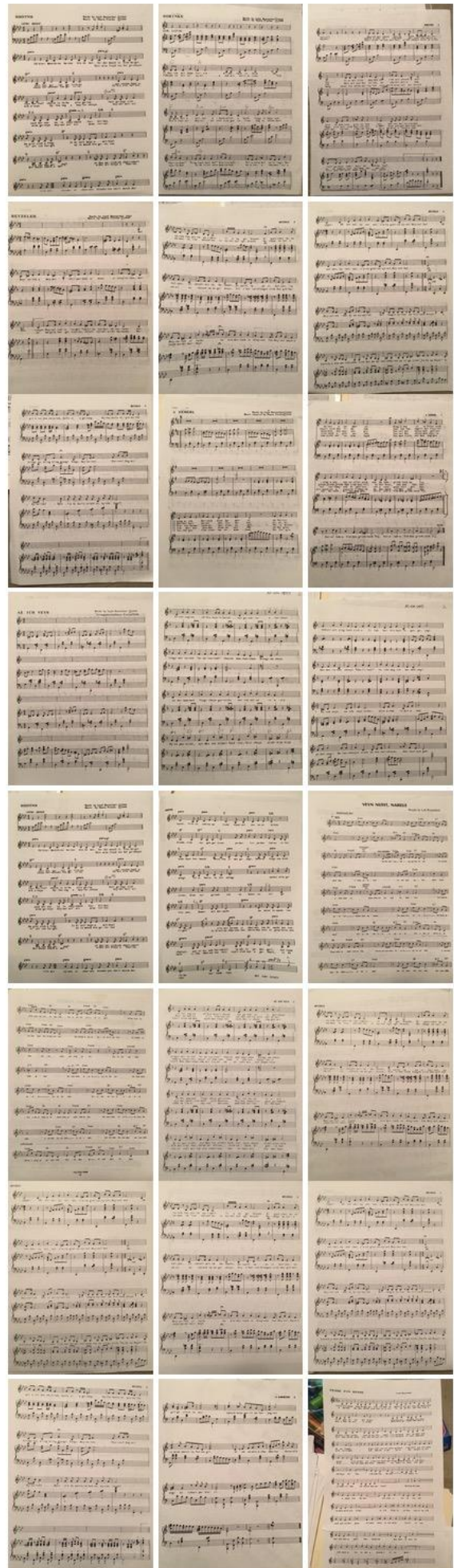
For the overall play, "Einer von uns", a tribute to a Jewish child, hidden by a family, Jolita Rosenthal received an award from the Society of Jewish Literature, active in the ghetto. He continued to write, and the very popular "Ich bin noch nicht fertig" (I am not yet finished) was a song about the Jewish people. He was, on stage, a popular song, and his music was a source of comfort for the Jewish people. He is the guardian of the memory and the Jewish people, and his music is a source of comfort for the Jewish people.

Leyb Rosenthal lives and will live, through the unforgettable story of his life, his music, and the memory of his people. He is a source of comfort for the Jewish people, and his music is a source of comfort for the Jewish people. He is a source of comfort for the Jewish people, and his music is a source of comfort for the Jewish people.

THE MUSIC

Leyb's sister, Chayela, wrote Leyb's songs down in a blue notebook after the war

Click on any photo to view and enlarge full text



Handwritten musical score for a large ensemble, featuring multiple staves with musical notation and lyrics in Hebrew. The score is organized into several systems, each containing multiple staves. The lyrics are written in Hebrew script below the musical notation. The paper is aged and shows signs of wear.

Handwritten musical score for a large ensemble, featuring multiple staves with musical notation and lyrics in Hebrew. The score is organized into several systems, each containing multiple staves. The lyrics are written in Hebrew script below the musical notation. The paper is aged and shows signs of wear. A small drawing of a person is visible in the lower right corner of the middle section.

Handwritten musical score for a large ensemble, featuring multiple staves with musical notation and lyrics in Hebrew. The score is organized into several systems, each containing multiple staves. The lyrics are written in Hebrew script below the musical notation. The paper is aged and shows signs of wear.